

THE CRANE CLASSICS



Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal

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THE CRANE CLASSICS

LOWELL'S
VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL,
AND OTHER POEMS.

WITH BIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

BY

MARGARET HILL McCARTER,

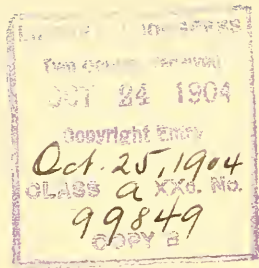
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BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

I.

“Happy he whom neither wealth nor fashion,
Nor the march of the encroaching city,
Drives an exile
From the hearth of his ancestral homestead.”

Elmwood, the lifelong home of James Russell Lowell, is a square, old-fashioned house in the city, once the village, of Cambridge, where historic homes grow every year more sacred to the American people. The house, as the name suggests, is surrounded by fine old elm trees, and set about by lilacs and syringa bushes. In the ante-Revolutionary days it was owned by Tory adherents, but after the war for independence it became the property of the Lowell family. Here, on February 22, 1819, James Russell Lowell was born. And here, on August 12, 1891, he died, having never in all his life called any other house his home. The Lowell family came originally from Bristol, England, and settled in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1639. The poet's ancestors were mostly professional men, noted for rendering much public service. His great-grandfather was a minister at Newburyport. His grandfather, John Lowell, was a member of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1780. It was from his uncle, Francis Cabot Lowell, that the city of Lowell takes its name. Another uncle is responsible

for establishing the famous Lowell Institute, of Boston. James Russell's father was a minister. His mother, whose maiden name was Harriet Spence, was of Scotch descent, and it was from her that her son received his poetic heritage. There were four other children in the family—two sons and two daughters—all older than himself.

In 1844 Lowell was married to Maria White, a woman of poetic temperament, whose influence over his life was most helpful. Added to her fine literary sense was her still finer moral sense of justice and high notion of purity and right. Something of Maria White-Lowell speaks in *The Present Crisis*, *The Commemoration Ode*, and *Villa Franca*. She died in 1853. On the night of her death one of Longfellow's children was born. It was of this occasion that Longfellow wrote his beautiful poem entitled *The Two Angels*. There were three children born to the poet and his wife. Blanche died in infancy, Walter in childhood, while a third, Mrs. Burnett, outlived both parents.

In 1857 Lowell married Miss Francis Dunlap, of Portland, Maine. Her death occurred in 1885. For six years longer the poet lived a quiet, somewhat lonely life in his beloved Elmwood.

He passed away at the age of seventy-two, leaving behind such a record of nobility and usefulness that he has more than once been called America's greatest man of letters.

II.

Lowell lived always among books. His first years were spent in a private school. Later he took up classical studies under William Wells, an English teacher of great thoroughness. He graduated from Harvard College in 1838, and two years later received his degree from the Harvard Law School.

Although he made some effort to follow the law and other pursuits, his inclination was always toward literature. And he soon returned to it after every departure. So we may say of him, that his life-work, excepting his years of public service, lay along literary lines.

In the year 1854 he delivered a course of lectures before the Lowell Institute. The following year he was elected to succeed Longfellow, to the chair of Modern Languages and Literature at Harvard College. He spent two years abroad fitting himself for this work. From 1857 to 1861 Lowell was the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Later, with Charles Eliot Norton, he edited the *North-American Review* for ten years. Again, in 1886, he lectured before the Lowell Institute.

His usefulness, however, was not limited to his teaching power and his pen. Through these years here noted he had made a study of history and politics. And when in 1877 he was appointed United States minister to Spain, he was amply able to fill the place offered to him. In 1880 he was sent as minister to the Court of St. James. No American minister was ever more acceptable to the English government, or was more honored by it.

Lowell's public service ranks him as a statesman of

high order. He was not in the narrow sense a partisan, but looked upon all public issues broadly as affecting the people, not the political party. Some of his best literary work is in his critical essays and addresses. It was inevitable that the fearless expression of his views should create a storm of bitter criticism from party leaders, who set office-holding above principle; but the perspective of history has justified Lowell and given him fame and honor.

III.

However, it is not Lowell the teacher, editor and statesman who most interests the student of classics, but Lowell the poet, dear to every mind who studies well the product of his pen.

He was a many-sided writer, an "all-round" man. Note the titles given to him: "The Songster of Elmwood," "The Author of the American Hudibras," "Our Ablest Critic," "Our New Theocritus."

Like all poets, he drew subjects from Nature, whom he studied and loved. Notable among this class of his poems are *An Indian Summer Reverie*, *The Oaks*, *Beaver Brook*, and *Under the Willows*. Also in his papers, *My Garden Acquaintances* and *A Good Word for Winter*, one sees how Lowell saw the outdoor world. In all American literature no poetry inspired by the sea is finer than Lowell's *Pictures from Appledore*. It is praise-compelling, leading the reader by the grip of its power.

"Trust me, 'tis something to be cast
Face to face with one's self at last,
To be taken out of the fuss and strife,
The endless clatter of plate and knife,

The bore of books and the bores of the street,
From the singular mess we agree to call Life,
Where that is best which most fools vote is,
And to be set down on one's own two feet
So nigh to the great warm heart of God,
You almost seem to feel it beat
Down from the sunshine and up from the sod."

So Lowell speaks when he transforms his Appledore from a common island into the wonderful thing his Pictures reveal.

Had the poet written nothing more than *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, he would have taken first rank with his kind. Since a study of it follows in this volume, it is not necessary to consider it here.

The Biglow Papers, for their day and purpose, stand unrivaled. The poet in them undertook to strike a blow at human slavery and the extension of the territory wherein it could exist. No forces are more powerful than satire and sarcasm. While they are of necessity short-lived, they are inversely proportional in their strength. In these papers the quaint Yankee dialect appealed at once to the common mind, while the richness of the humor fascinated it. With the close of the Civil War their purpose ceased to be, but by the merit of aptness their lines became household phrases, and so they grew into the living language from which they will never be uprooted.

But it must be conceded that the crowning glory of Lowell's literary ability lay not in his graceful poetry on Nature, nor the beautiful imagery of his legends, but in the strength and sublimity of his poems on Freedom. Here the reach of his mentality, his nobleness of character and clear insight and sense of justice, had full play.

So long as American literature endures, so long will *The Present Crisis* and the *Harvard Commemoration Ode* be studied with delight. And the inspiration to patriotism and heroism and unselfish right-living that they teach will still be a light to lead the future generations.

IV.

James Russell Lowell's life was cast in fortunate lines. Born of good parentage, surrounded with comforts, bred in an atmosphere of books, with literary associations on every hand, one more thing was in his favor. His time of life befell when history was at a fever heat of interest and inspiration. Wars sow the seeds for classic literature. Wars do not merely happen: they are the tremendous expression of clashing principles. Not alone do they spring from a wrestling of right with wrong—they are the struggle of the principles of a Lesser Good against a Greater Good. The poet who lives in the heart of warring times and places can put a soul into his poetry that no peaceful annals of history can inspire. In such a time Lowell lived, and helped to make life great. His laurels are of the unfading hue. As a writer he had grace of expression and beauty of imaginative conception. With these powers he lay his best gifts at the feet of Truth, and she crowned him with beauty and grace immortal.

And let it not be forgotten that the common man, Lowell, the teacher, the man of business, the statesman among statesmen, the friend and husband and father, was also noble, modest, capable, affectionate, brave, and true.

Such an American needs no coat of arms nor blazon of heraldry, but for all generations he will stand as he stood in his own generation,—

“A king, ay, every inch a king.”

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL.

According to the best authority, *The Vision of Sir Launfal* was composed under the spell of a poetic transport in forty-eight hours. It is one of the finest productions in American literature. The following note was prefixed to the first edition by the author, and was retained by him in all subsequent editions:

“According to the mythology of the Romancers, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was the cup out of which Jesus Christ partook of the last supper with his disciples. It was brought into England by Joseph of Arimathea, and remained there, an object of pilgrimage and adoration for many years, in the keeping of his lineal descendants. It was incumbent upon those who had charge of it to be chaste in thought, word and deed; but one of the keepers having broken this condition, the Holy Grail disappeared. From that time it was a favorite enterprise of the knights of Arthur’s court to go in search of it. Sir Galahad was at last successful in finding it, as may be read in the seventeenth book of the Romance of King Arthur. Tennyson has made Sir Galahad the subject of one of the most exquisite of his poems.”

The purpose of the poem is to teach modern Christianity through one of the old legends of King Arthur. It is symmetrical in its proportions, the two parts being introduced by preludes. In each of these preludes the poet, like the organist, gives the keynote to his composition. The first is full of the upbubbling life and joy of the June time. There is in it the suggestion of morning and

sunshine, and youth and hope and high ambition, all of which the first part holds.

The second prelude, in direct contrast with the first, carries all the chill of December in its tone. The dreary frost of old age and dead ambition is in its suggestion. Hope has given place to Endurance, and Pride and Selfishness are overcome by Humility and Love.

The literary style is exquisite. The poem abounds in beautiful figures of rhetoric that are as finely contrasted as the thought of the parts themselves, and the student finds a series of word-pictures that holds a world-wide lesson in its application.

In the study of this poem the following suggestions may be useful:

1. To know the meaning of each word.
2. To study the figures of rhetoric, especially the metaphors and similes in which it excels.
3. To contrast the figures in the first part and prelude with the corresponding figures in the last part and prelude.
4. To commit to memory the finest passages.

Suggestions 1, 2, and 4 apply equally to all the poems in this book.

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL.

PRELUDE TO PART FIRST.

OVER his keys the musing organist,
Beginning doubtfully and far away,
First lets his fingers wander as they list,
And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay:
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument 5
Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,
First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent
Along the wavering vista of his dream.

Not only around our infancy
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie; 10
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,
We Sinais climb and know it not.

Over our manhood bend the skies;
Against our fallen and traitor lives
The great winds utter prophecies: 15
With our faint hearts the mountain strives;
Its arms outstretched, the druid wood
Waits with its benedicite;
And to our age's drowsy blood
Still shouts the inspiring sea. 20

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,

The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;

At the Devil's booth are all things sold, 25
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:
'T is heaven alone that is given away,
'T is only God may be had for the asking; 30
No price is set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune, 35
And over it softly her warm ear lays:
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might, 40
An instant within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;
The cowslip startles in meadows green, 45
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves, 50
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives;

His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,— 55
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

Now is the high-tide of the year,
And whatever of life hath ebb'd away
Comes flooding back with a ripply cheer,
Into every bare inlet and creek and bay; 60
Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,
We are happy now because God wills it;
No matter how barren the past may have been,
'Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green;
We sit in the warm shade and feel right well 65
How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell;
We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing;
The breeze comes whispering in our ear,
That dandelions are blossoming near, 70

That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,
That the river is bluer than the sky,
That the robin is plastering his house hard by;
And if the breeze kept the good news back,
For other couriers we should not lack; 75

We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing,—
And hark! how clear bold Chanticleer,
Warmed with the new wine of the year,
Tells all in his lusty crowing!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how; 80
Everything is happy now,
Everything is upward striving;

'T is as easy now for the heart to be true
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue,—

'T is the natural way of living:

Who knows whither the clouds have fled?

In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake;
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,

The heart forgets its sorrow and ache;

The soul partakes of the season's youth,

90

And the sulphurous rifts of passion and woe
Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,

Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.

What wonder if Sir Launfal now

Remembered the keeping of his vow?

95

PART FIRST.

I.

"My golden spurs now bring to me,

And bring to me my richest mail,

For to-morrow I go over land and sea

In search of the Holy Grail;

Shall never a bed for me be spread,

100

Nor shall a pillow be under my head,

Till I begin my vow to keep;

Here on the rushes will I sleep,

And perchance there may come a vision true

Ere day create the world anew."

105

Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,

Slumber fell like a cloud on him,

And into his soul the vision flew.

II.

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,
In the pool drowsed the cattle up to their knees, 110
The little birds sang as if it were
The one day of summer in all the year,
And the very leaves seemed to sing on the trees:
The castle alone in the landscape lay
Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray: 115
'Twas the proudest hall in the North Countree,
And never its gates might opened be,
Save to lord or lady of high degree;
Summer besieged it on every side,
But the churlish stone her assaults defied; 120
She could not scale the chilly wall,
Though around it for leagues her pavilions tall
Stretched left and right,
Over the hills and out of sight;
Green and broad was every tent, 125
And out of each a murmur went
Till the breeze fell off at night.

III.

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,
And through the dark arch a charger sprang,
Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight, 130
In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright
It seemed the dark castle had gathered all
Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall
In his siege of three hundred summers long,
And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf, 135
Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,

And lightsome as a locust-leaf,
Sir Launfal flashed forth in his unscarred mail,
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

IV.

It was morning on hill and stream and tree, 140
And morning in the young knight's heart;
Only the castle moodily
Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,
And gloomed by itself apart;
The season brimmed all other things up 145
Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's cup.

V.

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,
He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the same,
Who begged with his hand and moaned as he sate;
And a loathing over Sir Launfal came; 150
The sunshine went out of his soul with a thrill,
The flesh 'neath his armor 'gan shrink and crawl,
And midway its leap his heart stood still
Like a frozen waterfall;
For this man, so foul and bent of stature, 155
Rasped harshly against his dainty nature,
And seemed the one blot on the summer morn,—
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

VI.

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:
"Better to me the poor man's crust, 160
Better the blessing of the poor,
Though I turn me empty from his door;

That is no true alms which the hand can hold;
He gives nothing but worthless gold

Who gives from a sense of duty; 165
But he who gives but a slender mite,
And gives to that which is out of sight,

That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty
Which runs through all and doth all unite,—
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms, 170
The heart outstretches its eager palms,
For a god goes with it and makes it store
To the soul that was starving in darkness before.”

PRELUDE TO PART SECOND.

Down swept the chill wind from the mountain peak,
From the snow five thousand summers old; 175
On open wold and hill-top bleak

It had gathered all the cold,
And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's cheek;
It carried a shiver everywhere
From the unleaved boughs and pastures bare; 180

The little brook heard it and built a roof
'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;
All night by the white stars' frosty gleams
He groined his arches and matched his beams; 185

Slender and clear were his crystal spars
As the lashes of light that trim the stars;
He sculptured every summer delight
In his halls and chambers out of sight;
Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt, 190

- Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees
Bending to counterfeit a breeze;
Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew
But silvery mosses that downward grew;
Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief 195
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;
Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear
For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here
He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops
And hung them thickly with diamond-drops, 200
That crystallised the beams of moon and sun,
And made a star of every one:
No mortal builder's most rare device
Could match this winter-palace of ice;
'T was as if every image that mirrored lay 205
In his depths serene through the summer day,
Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,
Lest the happy model should be lost,
Had been mimicked in fairy masonry
By the elfin builders of the frost. 210
- Within the hall are song and laughter,
The cheeks of Christmas grow red and jolly,
'And sprouting is every corbel and rafter
With lightsome green of ivy and holly;
Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide 215
Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide;
The broad flame-pennons droop and flap
And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;
Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,
Hunted to death in its galleries blind; 220

And swift little troops of silent sparks,
 Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,
 Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks
 Like herds of startled deer.
 But the wind without was eager and sharp, 225
 Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,
 And rattles and wrings
 The icy strings,
 Singing, in dreary monotone,
 A Christmas carol of its own, 230
 Whose burden still, as he might guess,
 Was — "Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!"
 The voice of the seneschal flared like a torch
 As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,
 And he sat in the gateway and saw all night 235
 The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,
 Through the window-slits of the castle old,
 Build out its piers of ruddy light
 Again the drift of the cold.

PART SECOND.

I.

THERE was never a leaf on bush or tree, 240
 The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;
 The river was dumb and could not speak,
 For the weaver Winter its shroud had spun,
 A single crow on the tree-top bleak
 From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun; 245
 Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,
 As if her veins were sapless and old,
 And she rose up decrepitiy
 For a last dim look at earth and sea.

II.

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate, 250
For another heir in his earldom sate;
An old, bent man, worn out and frail,
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;
Little he recked of his earldom's loss,
No more on his surcoat was blazoned the cross, 255
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

III.

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare
Was idle mail 'gainst the barbed air,
For it was just at the Christmas time; 260
So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,
And sought for a shelter from cold and snow
In the light and warmth of long-ago;
He sees the snake-like caravan crawl
O'er the edge of the desert, black and small, 265
Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,
He can count the camels in the sun,
As over the red-hot sands they pass
To where, in its slender necklace of grass,
The little spring laughed and leapt in the shade, 270
And with its own self like an infant played,
And waved its signal of palms.

IV.

"For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms;"—
The happy camels may reach the spring,
But Sir Launfal sees only the grewsome thing, 275

The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,
 That cowers beside him, a thing as lone
 And white as the ice-isles of Northern seas
 In the desolate horror of his disease.

V.

And Sir Launfal said,—“I behold in thee 280
 An image of Him who died on the tree;
 Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,—
 Thou also hast had the world’s buffets and scorns,—
 And to thy life were not denied
 The wounds in the hands and feet and side: 285
 Mild Mary’s Son, acknowledge me;
 Behold, through him, I give to Thee!”

VI.

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes
 And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he
 Remembered in what a haughtier guise 290
 He had flung an alms to leprosie,
 When he girt his young life up in gilded mail
 And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.
 The heart within him was ashes and dust;
 He parted in twain his single crust, 295
 He broke the ice on the streamlet’s brink,
 And gave the leper to eat and drink:
 ’T was a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,
 ’T was water out of a wooden bowl,—
 Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed, 300
 And ’t was red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.

VII.

As Sir Launfal mused with a downcast face,
A light shone round about the place;
The leper no longer crouched at his side,
But stood before him glorified, 305
Shining and tall and fair and straight
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,—
Himself the Gate whereby men can
Enter the temple of God and Man.

VIII.

His words were shed softer than leaves from the pine,
And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,
That mingle their softness and quiet in one
With the shaggy unrest they float down upon;
And the voice that was calmer than silence said,
“Lo it is I, be not afraid! 315
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here,—this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for Me but now;
This crust is My body broken for thee, 320
This water His blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another’s need:
Not what we give, but what we share,—
For the gift without the giver is bare; 325
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me.”

IX.

Sir Launfal awoke as from a swoond:—
 “The Grail in my castle here is found!
 Hang my idle armor up on the wall,
 Let it be the spider’s banquet-hall;
 He must be fenced with stronger mail
 Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.”

330

NOTES.

What is a prelude? What is the purpose of this prelude?

Define:

7. Auroral.

8. Vista.

9-10. See Wordsworth’s *Intimations of Immortality*, line 67:

“Heaven lies about us in our infancy.”

12. Sinais.

17. Druids.

25. Shrines.

18. *Benedicite* (Latin); literally, *Be thou blessed*. A blessing.

27. The cap hung round with bells was the head-gear of the court jester of the Middle Ages when the dress marked the rank to which each person belonged. See Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and Scott’s *Ivanhoe*.

42. Explain line.

52. Explain “deluge of summer.”

77. Define “Chanticleer.”

91-93. Note the fine simile.

97. “Mail.” Explain.

Define:

100. “Shall never a bed.”

103. “Rushes.”

116. North Countree — the former spelling in rhyme.

120. Explain “churlish stones.”

Define:

122. Pavilions.

128. Drawbridge.

130. Maiden knight. One whose honors were yet to be won.

Define:

146. Pitcher-plant.

147. Explain the rhetorical figure.

164. What is "worthless gold"?

160-173. Commit to memory. Contrast two preludes, carefully.

181-210. Commit to memory.

Define:

176. Wold.

184. Groined.

196. Arabesque.

204. Catherine II., Empress of Russia, had an ice palace built to gratify her royal whim. It lasted only a short time.

Note the contrast between the picture in 211-224 and the one in 225-231.

213. Define "corbel."

216. The Yule-log was the huge log of wood burned by the Scandinavians at the feast of Jule (Yule). The time of this feast corresponded with our Christmas, and when the Scandinavians became Christians they celebrated the Christmastide as they had their Yule-tide. So long as the Yule-log lasted there was holiday and feasting in the castle.

217. Explain "flame-pennons."

221-224. Note the beautiful figure.

233. Define seneschal.

Contrast 244 with 109.

Contrast 246-249 with 140-146.

250. "Hard gate." Explain.

255. Define "surcoat."

259. "Idle mail." Explain.

278-279. Note the powerful simile.

294-327. Commit to memory.

307. What was the "Beautiful Gate"?

315-327. Point out the two noblest lines.

What is the finest simile in the poem? The finest metaphor?

What is the purpose of the poem?

How long a time did the author spend in composing it?

If you were a painter, what group of lines suggests the finest picture to put on canvas?

ODE RECITED AT THE HARVARD COMMEMORATION.

[The following poem was read by Mr. Lowell on July 21, 1865, at Harvard University. The occasion was the commemoration of the services of the living and the dead Harvard students and graduates who had fought for the Union in the Civil War.]

I.

WEAK-WINGED is song,
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height
Whither the brave deed climbs for light:

We seem to do them wrong,
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler verse,
Our trivial song to honor those who come
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and drum,
And shaped in squadron-strophes their desire,
Live battle-odes whose lines were steel and fire:

Yet sometimes feathered words are strong,
A gracious memory to buoy up and save
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common grave
Of the unventurous throng.

II.

To-day our Reverend Mother welcomes back
Her wisest Scholars, those who understood
The deeper teaching of her mystic tome,
And offered their fresh lives to make it good:
No lore of Greece or Rome,
No science peddling with the names of things,

Or reading stars to find inglorious fates,
 Can lift our life with wings
 Far from Death's idle gulf that for the many waits,
 And lengthen out our dates
 With that clear fame whose memory sings 25
 In manly hearts to come, and nerves them and dilates:
 Nor such thy teaching, Mother of us all!
 Not such the trumpet-call
 Of thy diviner mood,
 That could thy sons entice 30
 From happy homes and toils, the fruitful nest
 Of those half-virtues which the world calls best,
 Into War's tumult rude;
 But rather far that stern device
 The sponsors chose that round thy cradle stood 35
 In the dim, unventured wood,
 The VERITAS that lurks beneath
 The letter's unprolific sheath,
 Life of whate'er makes life worth living,
 Seed-grain of high emprise, immortal food, 40
 One heavenly thing whereof earth hath the giving.

III.

Many loved Truth, and lavished life's best oil
 Amid the dust of books to find her,
 Content at last, for guerdon of their toil,
 With the cast mantle she hath left behind her. 45
 Many in sad faith sought for her,
 Many with crossed hands sighed for her;
 But these, our brothers, fought for her,
 At life's dear peril wrought for her,

So loved her that they died for her, 50
 Tasting the raptured fleetness
 Of her divine completeness;
 Their higher instinct knew
 Those love her best who to themselves are true,
 And what they dare to dream of, dare to do; 55
 They followed her and found her
 Where all may hope to find,
 Not in the ashes of the burnt-out mind,
 But beautiful, with danger's sweetness round her.
 Where faith made whole with deed 60
 Breathes its awakening breath
 Into the lifeless creed,
 They saw her plumed and mailed,
 With sweet, stern face unveiled,
 And all-repaying eyes, look proud on them in death. 65

IV.

Our slender life runs rippling by, and glides
 Into the silent hollow of the past;
 What is there that abides
 To make the next age better for the last?
 Is earth too poor to give us 70
 Something to live for here that shall outlive us?
 Some more substantial boon
 Than such as flows and ebbs with Fortune's fickle moon?
 The little that we see
 From doubt is never free; 75
 The little that we do
 Is but half-nobly true;
 With our laborious hiving

What men call treasure, and the gods call dross,
 Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving, 83
 Only secure in every one's conniving,
 A long account of nothings paid with loss,
 Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen wires,
 After our little hour of strut and rave,
 With all our pasteboard passions and desires, 85
 Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,
 Are tossed pell-mell together in the grave.
 But stay! no age was e'er degenerate,
 Unless men held it at too cheap a rate,
 For in our likeness still we shape our fate. 90
 Ah, there is something here
 Unfathomed by the cynic's sneer,
 Something that gives our feeble light
 A high immunity from Night,
 Something that leaps life's narrow bars 95
 To claim its birthright with the hosts of heaven;
 A seed of sunshine that doth leaven
 Our earthly dullness with the beams of stars,
 And glorify our clay
 With light from fountains elder than the Day; 100
 A conscience more divine than we,
 A gladness fed with secret tears,
 A vexing, forward-reaching sense
 Of some more noble permanence;
 A light across the sea, 105
 Which haunts the soul and will not let it be,
 Still glimmering from the heights of undegenerate years.

V.

Whither leads the path
 To ampler fates that leads?
 Not down through flowery meads, 110
 To reap an aftermath
 Of youth's vainglorious weeds;
 But up the steep, amid the wrath
 And shock of deadly-hostile creeds,
 Where the world's best hope and stay 115
 By battle's flashes groups a desperate way,
 And every turf the fierce foot clings to bleeds.
 Peace hath her not ignoble wreath,
 Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
 Light the black lips of cannon, and the sword 120
 Dreams in its easeful sheath;
 But some day the live coal behind the thought,
 Whether from Baäl's stone obscene,
 Or from the shrine serene
 Of God's pure altar brought, 125
 Bursts up in flame; the war of tongue and pen
 Learns with what deadly purpose it was fraught,
 And, helpless in the fiery passion caught,
 Shakes all the pillared state with shock of men:
 Some day the soft Ideal that we wooed 130
 Confronts us fiercely, foe-beset, pursued,
 And cries reproachful: "Was it, then, my praise,
 And not myself was loved? Prove now thy truth;
 I claim of thee the promise of thy youth;
 Give me thy life, or cower in empty phrase, 135

The victim of thy genius, not its mate!"

Life may be given in many ways,
 And loyalty to Truth be sealed
 As bravely in the closet as the field,
 So bountiful is Fate; 140
 But then to stand beside her,
 When craven churls deride her,
 To front a lie in arms and not to yield,
 This shows, methinks, God's plan
 And measure of a stalwart man, 145
 Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
 Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth,
 Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
 Fed from within with all the strength he needs.

VI.

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief, 150
 Whom late the Nation he had led,
 With ashes on her head,
 Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
 Forgive me, if from present things I turn
 To speak what in my heart will beat and burn, 155
 And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
 Nature, they say, doth dote,
 And cannot make a man
 Save on some worn-out plan,
 Repeating us by rote: 160
 For him her Old-World moulds aside she threw,
 And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
 Of the unexhausted West,
 With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,

Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true. 165
How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
Not lured by any cheat of birth, 170
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
They knew that outward grace is dust;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill, 175
And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.
His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind; 180
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human-kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still, 185
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface
And thwart her genial will;
Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face. 190
I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innative weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,

Safe in himself as in a fate. 195
 So always firmly he:
 He knew to bide his time,
 And can his fame abide,
 Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
 Till the wise years decide. 200
 Great captains, with their guns and drums,
 Disturb our judgment for the hour,
 But at last silence comes;
 These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
 Our children shall behold his fame, 205
 The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
 Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
 New birth of our new soil, the first American.

VII.

Long as man's hope insatiate can discern
 Or only guess some more inspiring goal 210
 Outside of Self, enduring as the pole,
 Along whose course the flying axles burn
 Of spirits bravely-pitched, earth's manlier brood;
 Long as below we cannot find
 The meed that stills the inexorable mind; 215
 So long this faith to some ideal Good,
 Under whatever mortal name it masks,
 Freedom, Law, Country, this ethereal mood
 That thanks the Fates for their severer tasks,
 Feeling its challenged pulses leap, 220
 While others skulk in subterfuges cheap,
 And, set in Danger's van, has all the boon it asks,
 Shall win man's praise and woman's love,
 Shall be a wisdom that we set above

All other skills and gifts to culture dear, 225
 A virtue round whose forehead we enwreath
 Laurels that with a living passion breathe
 When other crowns grow, while we twine them, sear.
 What brings us thronging these high rites to pay,
 And seal these hours the noblest of our year, 230
 Save that our brothers found this better way?

VIII.

We sit here in the Promised Land
 That flows with Freedom's honey and milk;
 But 't was they won it, sword in hand,
 Making the nettle danger soft for us as silk. 235
 We welcome back our bravest and our best; —
 Ah me! not all! some come not with the rest,
 Who went forth brave and bright as any here!
 I strive to mix some gladness with my strain,
 But the sad strings complain, 240
 And will not please the ear:
 I sweep them for a pæan, but they wane
 Again and yet again
 Into a dirge, and die away in pain.
 In these brave ranks I only see the gaps, 245
 Thinking of dear ones whom the dumb turf wraps,
 Dark to the triumph which they died to gain:
 Fitlier may others greet the living,
 For me the past is unforgiving;
 I with uncovered head 250
 Salute the sacred dead,
 Who went, and who return not. — Say not so!
 'T is not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
 But the high faith that failed not by the way;

Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave; 255
 No bar of endless night exiles the brave;
 And to the saner mind
 We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.
 Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
 For never shall their aureoled presence lack: 260
 I see them muster in a gleaming row,
 With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
 We find in our dull road their shining track;
 In every nobler mood
 We feel the orient of their spirit glow, 265
 Part of our life's unalterable good,
 Of all our saintlier aspiration;
 They come transfigured back,
 Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
 Beautiful evermore, and with the rays 270
 Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!

IX.

But is there hope to save
 Even this ethereal essence from the grave?
 What ever 'scaped Oblivion's subtle wrong
 Save a few clarion names, or golden threads of song? 275
 Before my musing eye
 The mighty ones of old sweep by,
 Disvoicèd now and insubstantial things,
 As noisy once as we; poor ghosts of kings,
 Shadows of empire wholly gone to dust, 280
 And many races, nameless long ago,
 To darkness driven by that imperious gust
 Of ever-rushing Time that here doth blow:

O visionary world, condition strange,
 Where naught abiding is but only Change, 285
 Where the deep-bolted stars themselves still shift and
 range!

Shall we to more continuance make pretence?
 Renown builds tombs; a life-estate is Wit;
 And, bit by bit,
 The cunning years steal all from us but woe: 290
 Leaves are we, whose decays no harvest sow.

But, when we vanish hence,
 Shall they lie forceless in the dark below,
 Save to make green their little length of sods,
 Or deepen pansies for a year or two, 295
 Who now to us are shining-sweet as gods?
 Was dying all they had the skill to do?
 That were not fruitless: but the Soul resents
 Such short-lived service, as if blind events
 Ruled without her, or earth could so endure; 300
 She claims a more divine investiture
 Of longer tenure than Fame's airy rents;
 Whate'er she touches doth her nature share;
 Her inspiration haunts the ennobled air,

Gives eyes to mountains blind,
 Ears to the deaf earth, voices to the wind, 305
 And her clear trump sings succor everywhere
 By lonely bivouacs to the wakeful mind;
 For soul inherits all that soul could dare:

Yea, Manhood hath a wider span
 And larger privilege of life than man. 310
 The single deed, the private sacrifice,
 So radiant now through proudly-hidden tears,

Is covered up ere long from mortal eyes
 With thoughtless drift of the deciduous years;
 But that high privilege that makes all men peers, 315
 That leap of heart whereby a people rise
 Up to a noble anger's height,
 And, flamed on by the Fates, not shrink, but grow more
 bright,
 That swift validity in noble veins,
 Of choosing danger and disdaining shame, 320
 Of being set on flame
 By the pure fire that flies all contact base,
 But wraps its chosen with angelic might,
 These are imperishable gains, 325
 Sure as the sun, medicinal as light,
 These hold great futures in their lusty reins
 And certify to earth a new imperial race.

X.

Who now shall sneer?
 Who dare again to say we trace
 Our lines to a plebeian race? 330
 Roundhead and Cavalier!
 Dumb are those names erewhile in battle loud;
 Dream-footed as the shadow of a cloud,
 They flit across the ear:
 That is best blood that hath most iron in't. 335
 To edge resolve with, pouring without stint
 For what makes manhood dear.
 Tell us not of Plantagenets,
 Hapsburgs, and Guelfs, whose thin bloods crawl
 Down from some victor in a border-brawl! 340
 How poor their outworn coronets,

Matched with one leaf of that plain civic wreath
Our brave for honor's blazon shall bequeath,

Through whose desert a rescued Nation sets
Her heel on treason, and the trumpet hears 345
Shout victory, tingling Europe's sullen ears
With vain resentments and more vain regrets!

XI.

Not in anger, not in pride,
Pure from passion's mixture rude,
Ever to base earth allied, 350
But with far-heard gratitude,
Still with heart and voice renewed,
To heroes living and dear martyrs dead,
The strain should close that consecrates our brave.

Lift the heart and lift the head! 355
Lofty be its mood and grave,
Not without a martial ring,
Not without a prouder tread
And a peal of exultation:
Little right has he to sing 360
Through whose heart in such an hour
Beats no march of conscious power,
Sweeps no tumult of elation!
'Tis no Man we celebrate,

By his country's victories great, 365
A hero half, and half the whim of Fate,
But the pith and marrow of a Nation
Drawing force from all her men,
Highest, humblest, weakest, all,
For her time of need, and then 370
Pulsing it again through them,

Till the basest can no longer cower,
Feeling his soul spring up divinely tall,
Touched but in passing by her mantle-hem.
Come back, then, noble pride, for 't is her dower !

375

How could poet ever tower,
If his passions, hopes, and fears,
If his triumphs and his tears,
Kept not measure with his people ?

Boom, cannon, boom to all the winds and waves !
Clash out, glad bells, from every rocking steeple !
Banners, advance with triumph, bend your staves !

380

And from every mountain-peak
Let beacon-fire to answering beacon speak,
Katahdin tell Monadnock, Whiteface he,
And so leap on in light from sea to sea,
Till the glad news be sent

385

Across a kindling continent,
Making earth feel more firm and air breathe braver :
"Be proud ! for she is saved, and all have helped to save
her !

390

She that lifts up the manhood of the poor,
She of the open soul and open door,
With room about her hearth for all mankind !
The fire is dreadful in her eyes no more ;
From her bold front the helm she doth unbind,
Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,
And bids her navies, that so lately hurled
Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in,
Swimming like birds of calm along the unharmed shore.
No challenge sends she to the elder world,
That looked askance and hated ; a light scorn

395

400

Plays o'er her mouth, as round her mighty knees
 She calls her children back, and waits the morn
 Of nobler day, enthroned between her subject seas."

XII.

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release! 405

Thy God, in these distempered days,

Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,
 And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!

Bow down in prayer and praise!

No poorest in thy borders but may now 410

Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow,

O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!

Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair

O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,

And letting thy set lips, 415

Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,

The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,

What words divine of lover or of poet

Could tell our love and make thee know it,

Among the Nations bright beyond compare? 420

What were our lives without thee?

What all our lives to save thee?

We reck not what we gave thee;

We will not dare to doubt thee,

But ask whatever else, and we will dare! 425

NOTES.

2. Define "clear-ethered."

5. Explain meaning.

9. What are "squadron-strophes"?

13. *Lethe*, a river in Hades, whose waters, when drunk, caused forgetfulness of the past; oblivion.

15. Reverend Mother — Alma Mater, Harvard University.

37. *Veritas* — truth. The emblem of Harvard University is a shield with "*Veritas*" upon three open books.

38. Explain "unprolific sheath."

42-65. Commit to memory.

85. What are the "pasteboard passions and desires"?

94. Define "immunity."

107. Explain "undegenerate years."

117. Explain the line.

123. *Baal*. The god of the Phœnicians, Assyrians, and other ancient heathen nations.

136. Explain the meaning.

137-149. Commit to memory.

Name some of the "stalwart men" of history.

150. Abraham Lincoln.

151. Antecedent of *whom*.

152. Antecedent of *her*.

175-177. Note the fineness of the figure.

190. *Plutarch* was a writer of the early Christian Era, whose biographies combined the attributes of *heroes* and the attributes of *men*. He was master of his art.

201-208. Commit to memory.

242-244. Contrast the terms "pæans" and "dirge."

253. See Numbers, chapter XIII.

255. See Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*:

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

260. Explain "aureoled presence."

280. Note the beauty of the line.

289. How does Renown build tombs?

301. Define "investiture."

315. What figure in "deciduous years"?

325. How is light medicinal?

331. The Roundheads were the Puritans in England who fought against King Charles I. They wore their hair cropped short, while the Cavaliers, the king's supporters, wore long hair elaborately dressed.

333. Note the beauty of the simile.

338. *Plantagenets*. The second dynasty of English kings after the Norman conquest. They were Henry II., Richard I., John, Henry III., Edward I., II., III., Richard II.

339. *Hapsburg*, the house that succeeded the Stuart house on the English throne.

Guelph, the surname of the present royal house of England.

342. Explain "civic wreath."

343. Explain "honor's blazon."

360-363. Note the spirit of patriotism.

376-379. Is this true of poets?

385. New England mountain-peaks.

391. Antecedent of "she"?

396. What are "handmaid armies"?

404. What are "subject seas"?

408. Explain the meaning of the line.

THE FIRST SNOW-FALL.

THE snow had begun in the gloaming,
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence deep and white.

Every pine and fir and hemlock 5
Wore ermine too dear for an earl,
And the poorest twig on the elm-tree,
Was ridged inch-deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara 10
Came Chanticleer's muffled crow,
The stiff rails were softened to swan's-down,
And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window 15
The noiseless work of the sky,
And the sudden flurries of snow-birds,
Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn 20
Where a little headstone stood ;
How the flakes were folding it gently,
As did robins the babes in the wood.

Up spoke our own little Mabel,
Saying, "Father, who makes it snow ?"
And I told her of the good All-father
Who cares for us here below.

Again I looked at the snow-fall, 25
And thought of the leaden sky
That arched o'er our first great sorrow,
When that mound was heaped so high.

I remembered the gradual patience
That fell from that cloud like snow, 30
Flake by flake, healing and hiding
The scar of our deep-plunged woe.

And again to the child I whispered,
"The snow that husheth all,
Darling, the merciful Father 35
Alone can make it fall!"

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;
And she, kissing back, could not know
That *my* kiss was given to her sister,
Folded close under deepening snow. 40

NOTES.

Contrast the first three stanzas with Whittier's *Snow-Bound*, lines 32-65. The volume containing this poem is dedicated "to the ever fresh and happy memory of our little Blanche."

9. *Carrara*. A beautiful Italian marble, noted for its purity.

15. Note the simile.

29-30. Note the simile.

VILLA FRANCA.

[In 1859, Italy by the battles of Magenta and Solferino had hope of complete emancipation from Austrian rule. Napoleon III., who was in alliance with Victor Emmanuel, King of Sardinia, had a conference with Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria, at Villa Franca. The result of the conference was far from pleasing to Victor Emmanuel or promising for the unification of Italy. Napoleon was regarded as untrue to his trust, and the war continued. Mr. Lowell in the following poem gives his estimate of the French emperor.]

WAIT a little: do *we* not wait?
 Louis Napoleon is not Fate,
 Francis Joseph is not Time;
 There's One hath swifter feet than Crime;
 Cannon-parliaments settle naught; 5
 Venice is Austria's,—whose is Thought?
 Minié is good, but, spite of change,
 Gutenberg's gun has the longest range.
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever! 10
 In the shadow, year out, year in,
 The silent headsman waits forever.

Wait, we say; our years are long;
 Men are weak, but Man is strong;
 Since the stars first curved their rings, 15
 We have looked on many things;
 Great wars come and great wars go,
 Wolf-tracks light on polar snow;
 We shall see him come and gone,
 This second-hand Napoleon. 20
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!

Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
 In the shadow, year out, year in,
 The silent headsman waits forever.

We saw the elder Corsican, 25
 And Clotho muttered as she span,
 While crownèd lackeys bore the train,
 Of the pinchbeck Charlemagne:
 "Sister, stint not length of thread!
 Sister, stay the scissors dread! 30
 On Saint Helen's granite bleak,
 Hark, the vulture whets his beak!"
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
 In the shadow, year out, year in, 35
 The silent headsman waits forever.

The Bonapartes, we know their bees
 That wade in honey red to the knees:
 Their patent reaper, its sheaves sleep sound
 In dreamless garners underground: 40
 We know false glory's spendthrift race
 Pawning nations for feathers and lace;
 It may be short, it may be long,
 "'Tis reckoning-day!" sneers unpaid Wrong.
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin! 45
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
 In the shadow, year out, year in,
 The silent headsman waits forever.

The Cock that wears the Eagle's skin
 Can promise what he ne'er could win; 50

Slavery reaped for fine words sown,
 System for all, and rights for none,
 Despots atop, a wild clan below,
 Such is the Gaul from long ago;
 Wash the black from the Ethiop's face, 55
 Wash the past out of man or race!
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
 In the shadow, year out, year in,
 The silent headsman waits forever. 60

'Neath Gregory's throne a spider swings,
 And snares the people for the kings;
 "Luther is dead; old quarrels pass;
 The stake's black scars are healed with grass;"
 So dreamers prate; did man e'er live 65
 Saw priest or woman yet forgive;
 But Luther's broom is left, and eyes
 Peep o'er their creeds to where it lies.
 Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever! 70
 In the shadow, year out, year in,
 The silent headsman waits forever.

Smooth sails the ship of either realm,
 Kaiser and Jesuit at the helm;
 We look down the depths, and mark 75
 Silent workers in the dark
 Building slow the sharp-tusked reefs,
 Old instincts hardening to new beliefs;
 Patience a little; learn to wait;
 Hours are long on the clock of Fate. 80

Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
 Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
 Darkness is strong, and so is Sin,
 But only God endures forever!

NOTES.

5. What are "cannon" parliaments?

7. *Minie*, a rifle invented by Claude Etienne Minié; was adopted by the French government in 1849. It was superior in the precision and range it gave to the bullet over all other firearms of that time.

8. *Gutenberg's gun*. The printing-press. Another way of saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword."

9. *Clotho*, *Lachesis* and *Atropos* were the three Fates of early mythology. Clotho spun the thread of human destiny; Lachesis twisted it, and Atropos severed it. They have furnished a subject for many masterpieces of art. Clotho and Lachesis are sometimes represented as young maidens, while Atropos appears as an old woman. She carries the shears, while Clotho holds the distaff.

17. See *Commemoration Ode*, lines 201-208. Also, Kipling's *Recessional*:

"Far-culled our navies melt away —
 On dune and headland sinks the fire —
 Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
 Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!"

25. *The elder Corsican*, Napoleon Bonaparte.

28. *Pinchbeck*, cheap imitation jewelry.

Charlemagne, Charles the Great, master of all western Europe in the eighth century.

37. The bee was the emblem of the Bonaparte family.

54. *Gaul*, the early Celtic race in France.

61. Pope Gregory VII., in the eleventh century humbled the kings and brought papacy to its supreme power.

THE NIGHTINGALE IN THE STUDY.

"COME forth!" my catbird calls to me,

"And hear me sing a cavatina
That, in this old familiar tree,
Shall hang a garden of Alcina.

"These buttercups shall brim with wine
Beyond all Lesbian juice or Massic;
May not New England be divine?
My ode to ripening summer classic?"

"Or, if to me you will not hark,
By Beaver Brook a thrush is ringing
Till all the alder-coverts dark
Seem sunshine-dappled with his singing.

"Come out beneath the unmastered sky,
With its emancipating spaces,
And learn to sing as well as I,
Without premeditated graces.

"What boot your many-volumed gains,
Those withered leaves forever turning,
To win, at best, for all your pains,
A nature mummy-wrapt in learning?"

"The leaves wherein true wisdom lies
On living trees the sun are drinking;
Those white clouds, drawing through the skies,
Grew not so beautiful by thinking.

“Come out! with me the oriole cries, 25
Escape the demon that pursues you!
And, hark, the cuckoo weatherwise,
Still hiding, farther onward wooes you.”

“Alas, dear friend, that, all my days, 30
Has poured from thy syringa thicket
The quaintly discontinuous lays
To which I hold a season-ticket,—

“A season-ticket cheaply bought
With a dessert of pilfered berries, 35
And who so oft my soul has caught
With morn and evening voluntaries,—

“Deem me not faithless, if all day
Among my dusty books I linger,
No pipe, like thee, for June to play
With fancy-led, half-conscious finger. 40

“A bird is singing in my brain
And bubbling o’er with mingled fancies,
Gay, tragic, rapt, right heart of Spain
Fed with the sap of old romances.

“I ask no ampler skies than those 45
His magic music rears above me,
No falser friends, no truer foes,—
And does not Doña Clara love me?

“Cloaked shapes, a twanging of guitars, 50
A rush of feet, and rapiers clashing,

Then silence deep with breathless stars,
And overhead a white hand flashing.

“O music of all moods and climes,
Vengeful, forgiving, sensuous, saintly,
Where still, between the Christian chimes,
The Moorish cymbal tinkles faintly!

55

“O life borne lightly in the hand,
For friend or foe with grace Castilian!
O valley safe in Fancy's land,
Not tramped to mud yet by the million!

60

“Bird of to-day, thy songs are stale
To his, my singer of all weathers,
My Calderon, my nightingale,
My Arab soul in Spanish feathers.

“Ah, friend, these singers dead so long,
And still, God knows, in purgatory,
Give its best sweetness to all song,
To Nature's self her better glory.”

65

THE PRESENT CRISIS.

[The following poem was written in 1844, when the annexation of Texas was pending. It had become a party issue in the presidential campaign. The pro-slavery party favored it as a means of increasing slave territory, and the anti-slavery party opposed it for the same reason. It is one of the finest poems in American literature.]

WHEN a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad
earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to
west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within
him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of
Time. 5

Through the walls of hut and palace shoots the instan-
taneous throe,
When the travail of the Ages wrings earth's systems to
and fro;
At the birth of each new Era, with a recognizing start,
Nation wildly looks at nation, standing with mute lips
apart,
And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child leaps beneath
the Future's heart. 10

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies
with God

In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by
the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler
clod. 15

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or
wrong;
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast
frame
Through its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or
shame; —
In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal
claim. 20

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil
side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the
bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon
the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and
that light. 25

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt
stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against
our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 'tis Truth alone is
strong,

And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her
 throng
 Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all
 wrong. 30

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
 That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Ob-
 livion's sea;
 Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
 Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet
 earth's chaff must fly;
 Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath
 passed by. 35

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but re-
 cord
 One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and
 the Word;
 Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the
 throne,—
 Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim
 unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his
 own. 40

We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is
 great,
 Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of
 fate,
 But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din,

List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave
within,—

“They enslave their children’s children who make com-
promise with sin.” 45

Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops, fellest of the giant brood,
Sons of brutish Force and Darkness, who have drenched
the earth with blood,

Famished in his self-made desert, blinded by our purer day,
Gropes in yet unblasted regions for his miserable prey;—
Shall we guide his gory fingers where our helpless children
play? 50

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her
wretched crust,

Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and ’t is prosperous
to be just;

Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands
aside,

Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had
denied. 55

Count me o’er earth’s chosen heroes,— they were souls that
stood alone,

While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious
stone,

Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam
incline

To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith
 divine,
 By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme
 design. 60

By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I
 track,
 Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not
 back,
 And these mounts of anguish number how each generation
 learned
 One new word of that grand *Credo* which in prophet-hearts
 hath burned
 Since the first man stood God-conquered with his face to
 heaven upturned. 65

For humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr
 stands,
 On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;
 Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots
 burn,
 While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
 To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

'T is as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves 71
 Of a legendary virtue carved upon our fathers' graves,
 Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a
 crime; —
 Was the Mayflower launched by cowards, steered by men
 behind their time?
 Turn those tracks toward Past or Future, that make Ply-
 mouth Rock sublime? 75

They were men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue was the Past's;
But we make their truth our falsehood, thinking that hath
 made us free,
Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our tender spirits
 flee
The rude grasp of that great Impulse which drove them
 across the sea. 80

They have rights who dare maintain them; we are traitors
 to our sires,
Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's new-lit altar-
 fires;
Shall we make their creed our jailer? Shall we, in our
 haste to slay,
From the tombs of the old prophets steal the funeral lamps
 away
To light up the martyr-fagots round the prophets of to-
 day? 85

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good
 uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep
 abreast of Truth;
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must
 Pilgrims be,
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the des-
 perate winter sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-
 rusted key. 90

NOTES.

17. Morse's telegraph had been first operated a short time before this poem was written.

26-30. Commit to memory.

46. Look up the story of Cyclops.

57. Define "contumelious."

64. *Credo*, "I believe." The creed or belief of the church. In the Latin it begins with the word *Credo*.

74. Reference to the Mayflower was especially pertinent, since Lowell was a New England man.

76. *Iconoclasts*, idol-breakers.

84-85. Explain the figure.

THE BIGLOW PAPERS.

[The *Biglow Papers* were a series of satirical poems, written in Yankee dialect and published in a Boston newspaper. They were assumed to be written by Hosea Biglow and edited by the Reverend Homer Wilbur. They were political in purpose, and their keen wit and satire made them powerful weapons against the Southern party during the time of the Mexican War.

When the Civil War broke out, Mr. Lowell wrote a second series of "*Biglow Papers*," for the *Atlantic Monthly*. They were as powerful as the first series had been. The following poem was written just before the close of the war.]

DEAR SIR, — Your letter come to han'

Requestin' me to please be funny;

But I ain't made upon a plan

Thet knows wut's comin', gall or honey:

Ther' 's times the world doos look so queer,

5

Odd fancies come afore I call 'em;

An' then agin, for half a year,

No preacher 'thout a call's more solemn.

You're'n want o' sunthin' light an' cute,

Rattlin' an' shrewd an' kin' o' jinglish,

10

An' wish, pervidin' it 'ould suit,

I'd take an' citify my English.

I *ken* write long-tailed, ef I please, —

But when I'm jokin', no, I thankee;

Then, 'fore I know it, my idees

15

Run helter-skelter into Yankee.

Sence I begun to scribble rhyme,

I tell ye wut, I hain't ben foolin';

The parson's books, life, death, an' time
Hev took some trouble with my schoolin'; 20
Nor th' airth don't git put out with me,
Thet love her 'z though she wuz a woman;
Why, th' ain't a bird upon the tree
But half forgives my bein' human.

An' yit I love th' unhighschool'd way 25
Ol' farmers hed when I wuz younger;
Their talk wuz meatier, an' 'ould stay,
While book-froth seems to whet your hunger;
For puttin' in a downright lick
'Twixt Humbug's eyes, ther' 's few can metch it. 30
An' then it helves my thoughts ez slick
Ez stret-grained hickry doos a hatchet.

But when I can't, I can't, thet's all,
For Natur' won't put up with gullin';
Idees you hev to shove an' haul 35
Like a druv pig ain't wuth a mullein:
Live thoughts ain't sent for; thru all rifts
O' sense they pour an' resh ye onwards,
Like rivers when south-lyin' drifts
Feel thet th' old airth 's a-wheelin' sunwards. 40

Time wuz, the rhymes come crowdin' thick
Ez office-seekers arter 'lection,
An' into ary place 'ould stick
Without no bother nor objection;
But sence the war my thoughts hang back 45
Ez though I wanted to enlist 'em,

An' subs'tutes — *they* don't never lack,
But then they 'll slope afore you 've mist 'em.

Nothin' don't seem like wut it wuz;
I can't see wut there is to hender, 50
An' yit my brains jes' go buzz, buzz,
Like bumblebees agin a winder;
'Fore these times come, in all airth's row,
Ther' wuz one quiet place, my head in,
Where I could hide an' think, — but now 55
It's all one teeter, hopin', dreadin'.

Where's Peace? I start, some clear-blown night,
When gaunt stone walls grow numb an' number,
An', creakin' 'cross the snow-crus' white,
Walk the col' starlight into summer; 60
Up grows the moon, an' swell by swell
Thru the pale pasturs silvers dimmer
Than the last smile thet strives to tell
O' love gone heavenward in its shimmer.

I hev ben gladder o' sech things 65
Than cocks o' spring or bees o' clover,
They filled my heart with livin' springs,
But now they seem to freeze em' over;
Sights innercent ez babes on knee,
Peaceful ez eyes o' pastur'd cattle, 70
Jes' coz they be so, seem to me
To rile me more with thoughts o' battle.

In-doors an' out by spells I try;
Ma'am Natur' keeps her spin-wheel goin',

But leaves my natur' stiff and dry 75
 Ez fiel's o' clover arter mowin';
An' her jes' kepin' on the same,
 Calmer n' a clock, an' never carin',
An' findin' nary thing to blame,
 Is wus than ef she took to swearin'. 80

Snow-flakes come whisperin' on the pane,
 The charm makes blazin' logs so pleasant,
But I can't hark to wut they're say'n',
 With Grant or Sherman ollers present;
The chimbleys shudder in the gale, 85
 Thet lulls, then suddin takes to flappin'
Like a shot hawk, but all's ez stale
 To me ez so much sperit-rappin'.

Under the yaller-pines I house,
 When sunshine makes 'em all sweet-scented, 90
An' hear among their furry boughs
 The baskin' west-wind pour contented,
While 'way o'erhead, ez sweet an' low
 Ez distant bells thet ring for meetin',
The wedged wil' geese their bugles blow, 95
 Further an' further South retreatin'.

Or up the slippery knob I strain
 An' see a hundred hills like islan's
Lift their blue woods in broken chain
 Out o' the sea o' snowy silence; 100
The farm-smokes, sweetes' sight on airth,
 Slow thru the winter air a-shrinkin'

Seem kin' o' sad, an' roun' the hearth
Of empty places set me thinkin'.

Beaver roars hoarse with meltin' snows, 105
An' rattles di'mon's from his granite;
Time wuz, he snatched away my prose,
An' into psalms or satires ran it;
But he, nor all the rest thet once
Started my blood to country-dances, 110
Can't set me goin' more'n a dunce
Thet hain't no use for dreams an' fancies.

Rat-tat-tat-tattle thru the street
I hear the drummers makin' riot,
An' I set thinkin' o' the feet 115
Thet follered once an' now are quiet, —
White feet ez snowdrops innercent,
Thet never knowed the paths o' Satan,
Whose comin' step ther' 's ears thet won't,
No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'. 120

Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee?
Didn't I love to see 'em growin',
Three likely lads ez wal could be,
Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin'?
I set an' look into the blaze 125
Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps climbin',
Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

Wut's words to them whose faith an' truth
On War's red techstone rang true metal, 130

Who ventered life an' love an' youth
For the gret prize o' death in battle?
To him who, deadly hurt, agen
Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
Tippin' with fire the bolt of men 135
Thet rived the Rebel line asunder?

'T ain't right to hev the young go fust,
All throbbin' full o' gifts an' graces,
Leavin' life's paupers dry ez dust
To try an' make b'lieve fill their places: 140
Nothin' but tells us wut we miss,
Ther' 's gaps our lives can't never fay in,
An' *thet* world seems so fur from this
Lef' for us loafers to grow gray in!

My eyes cloud up for rain; my mouth 145
Will take to twitchin' roun' the corners;
I pity mothers, tu, down South,
For all they sot among the scornors:
I'd sooner take my chance to stan'
At Jedgment where your meanest slave is, 150
Than at God's bar hol' up a han'
Ez drippin' red ez yourn, Jeff Davis!

Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed
For honor lost an' dear ones wasted,
But proud, to meet a people proud, 155
With eyes thet tell o' triumph tasted!
Come, with han' grippin' on the hilt,
An' step thet proves ye Victory's daughter!

Longin' for you, our sperits wilt
 Like shipwrecked men's on raf's for water. 160

Come, while our country feels the lift
 Of a gret instinct shoutin' forwards,
 An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift
 Thet tarries long in han's o' cowards!
 Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when 165
 They kissed their cross with lips thet quivered,
 An' bring fair wages for brave men,
 A nation saved, a race delivered!

NOTES.

93. Note the figure.
 95. *Wedged wil' geese*. Explain the force of the adjective *wedged*.
 97. Compare with Longfellow's "Golden Milestone."
 105. Beaver Brook flows into the Charles.
 145. A quaint figure.

PROMETHEUS.

[According to Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from the altar of Zeus and gave it as a gift to man. For this offense he was bound upon a lonely rock on Mount Caucasus, and it was decreed that a vulture should prey upon his liver daily, and what was destroyed in the daytime was renewed at night. The struggle of humanity against fear and superstition, and the whole realm of untrained imagination, is typified by the poem. Longfellow, Shelley, Goethe and Mrs. Browning have all made this myth subject for poetic production.]

ONE after one the stars have risen and set,
Sparkling upon the hoarfrost on my chain:
The Bear, that prowled all night about the fold
Of the North-Star, hath shrunk into his den,
Scared by the blithesome footsteps of the Dawn, 5
Whose blushing smile floods all the Orient;
And now bright Lucifer grows less and less,
Into the heaven's blue quiet deep-withdrawn.
Sunless and starless all, the desert sky
Arches above me, empty as this heart 10
For ages hath been empty of all joy,
Except to brood upon its silent hope,
As o'er its hope of day the sky doth now.
All night have I heard voices: deeper yet
The deep low breathing of the silence grew, 15
While all about, muffled in awe, there stood
Shadows, or forms, or both, clear-felt at heart,
But, when I turned to front them, far along
Only a shudder through the midnight ran,
And the dense stillness walled me closer round. 20
But still I heard them wander up and down

That solitude, and flappings of dusk wings
Did mingle with them, whether of those hags
Let slip upon me once from Hades deep,
Or of yet direr torments, if such be, 25
I could but guess; and then toward me came
A shape as of a woman: very pale
It was, and calm; its cold eyes did not move,
And mine moved not, but only stared on them.
Their fixed awe went through my brain like ice; 30
A skeleton hand seemed clutching at my heart,
And a sharp chill, as if a dank night fog
Suddenly closed me in, was all I felt:
And then, methought, I heard a freezing sigh,
A long, deep, shivering sigh, as from blue lips 35
Stiffening in death, close to mine ear. I thought
Some doom was close upon me, and I looked
And saw the red moon through the heavy mist,
Just setting, and it seemed as it were falling,
Or reeling to its fall, so dim and dead 40
And palsy-struck it looked. Then all sounds merged
Into the rising surges of the pines,
Which, leagues below me, clothing the gaunt loins
Of ancient Caucasus with hairy strength,
Sent up a murmur in the morning wind, 45
Sad as the wail that from the populous earth
All day and night to high Olympus soars,
Fit incense to thy wicked throne, O Jove!

Thy hated name is tossed once more in scorn
From off my lips, for I will tell thy doom. 50
And are these tears? Nay, do not triumph, Jove!

They are wrung from me but by the agonies
Of prophecy, like those sparse drops which fall
From clouds in travel of the lightning, when
The great wave of the storm high-curved and black 55
Rolls steadily onward to its thunderous break.
Why art thou made a god of, thou poor type
Of anger, and revenge, and cunning force?
True Power was never born of brutish strength,
Nor sweet Truth suckled at the shaggy dugs 60
Of that old she-wolf. Are thy thunder-bolts,
That quell the darkness for a space, so strong
As the prevailing patience of meek Light,
Who, with the invincible tenderness of peace,
Wins it to be a portion of herself? 65
Why art thou made a god of, thou, who hast
The never-sleeping terror at thy heart,
That birthright of all tyrants, worse to bear
Than this thy ravening bird on which I smile?
Thou swear'st to free me, if I will unfold 70
What kind of doom it is whose omen flits
Across thy heart, as o'er a troop of doves
The fearful shadow of the kite. What need
To know that truth whose knowledge cannot save?
Evil its errand hath, as well as God; 75
When thine is finished, thou art known no more:
There is a higher purity than thou,
And higher purity is greater strength;
Thy nature is thy doom, at which thy heart
Trembles behind the thick wall of thy might. 80
Let man but hope, and thou art straightway chilled
With thought of that drear silence and deep night

Which, like a dream, shall swallow thee and thine:
Let man but will, and thou art god no more,
More capable of ruin than the gold 85
And ivory that image thee on earth.
He who hurled down the monstrous Titan-brood
Blinded with lightnings, with rough thunder stunned,
Is weaker than a simple human thought.
My slender voice can shake thee, as the breeze, 90
That seems but apt to stir a maiden's hair,
Sways huge Oceanus from pole to pole;
For I am still Prometheus, and foreknow
In my wise heart the end and doom of all.

Yes, I am still Prometheus, wiser grown 95
By years of solitude, — that holds apart
The past and future, giving the soul room
To search into itself, — and long commune
With this eternal silence; — more a god,
In my long-suffering and strength to meet 100
With equal front the direst shafts of fate,
Than thou in thy faint-hearted despotism,
Girt with thy baby-toys of force and wrath.
Yes, I am that Prometheus who brought down
The light to man, which thou, in selfish fear, 105
Hadst to thyself usurped, — his by sole right,
For man hath right to all save Tyranny, —
And which shall free him yet from thy frail throne.
Tyrants are but the spawn of Ignorance,
Begotten by the slaves they trample on, 110
Who, could they win a glimmer of the light,
And see that Tyranny is always weakness,

Or Fear with its own bosom ill at ease,
Would laugh away in scorn the sand-wove chain
Which their own blindness feigned for adamant. 115
Wrong ever builds on quicksands, but the Right
To the firm centre lays its moveless base.
The tyrant trembles, if the air but stirs
The innocent ringlets of a child's free hair,
And crouches, when the thought of some great spirit, 120
With world-wide murmur, like a rising gale,
Over men's hearts, as over standing corn,
Rushes, and bends them to its own strong will.
So shall some thought of mine yet circle earth,
And puff away thy crumbling altars, Jove! 125

And, wouldst thou know of my supreme revenge,
Poor tyrant, even now dethroned in heart,
Realmless in soul, as tyrants ever are,
Listen! and tell me if this bitter peak,
This never-glutted vulture, and these chains 130
Shrink not before it; for it shall befit
A sorrow-taught, unconquered Titan-heart.
Men, when their death is on them, seem to stand
On a precipitous crag that overhangs
The abyss of doom, and in that depth to see, 135
As in a glass, the features dim and vast
Of things to come, the shadows, as it seems,
Of what had been. Death ever fronts the wise;
Not fearfully, but with clear promises
Of larger life, on whose broad vans upborne, 140
Their outlook widens, and they see beyond
The horizon of the present and the past,

Even to the very source and end of things.
 Such am I now: immortal woe hath made
 My heart a seer, and my soul a judge 145
 Between the substance and the shadow of Truth.
 The sure supremeness of the Beautiful,
 By all the martyrdoms made doubly sure
 Of such as I am, this is my revenge,
 Which of my wrongs builds a triumphal arch, 150
 Through which I see a sceptre and a throne.
 The pipings of glad shepherds on the hills,
 Tending the flocks no more to bleed for thee, —
 The songs of maidens pressing with white feet
 The vintage on thine altars poured no more, — 155
 The murmurous bliss of lovers, underneath
 Dim grapevine bowers, whose rosy bunches press
 Not half so closely their warm cheeks, unpaled
 By thoughts of thy brute lust, — the hive-like hum
 Of peaceful commonwealths, where sunburnt Toil 160
 Reaps for itself the rich earth made its own
 By its own labor, lightened with glad hymns
 To an omnipotence which thy mad bolts
 Would cope with as a spark with the vast sea, —
 Even the spirit of free love and peace, 165
 Duty's sure recompense through life and death, —
 These are such harvests as all master-spirits
 Reap, haply not on earth, but reap no less
 Because the sheaves are bound by hands not theirs;
 These are the bloodless daggers wherewithal 170
 They stab fallen tyrants, this their high revenge:
 For their best part of life on earth is when,
 Long after death, prisoned and pent no more,

Their thoughts, their wild dreams even, have become
Part of the necessary air men breathe: 175
When, like the moon, herself behind a cloud,
They shed down light before us on life's sea,
That cheers us to steer onward still in hope.
Earth with her twining memories ivies o'er
Their holy sepulchres; the chainless sea, 180
In tempest or wide calm, repeats their thoughts;
The lightning and the thunder, all free things,
Have legends of them for the ears of men.
All other glories are as falling stars,
But universal Nature watches theirs: 185
Such strength is won by love of human-kind.

Not that I feel that hunger after fame,
Which souls of a half-greatness are beset with;
But that the memory of noble deeds
Cries shame upon the idle and the vile, 190
And keeps the heart of Man forever up
To the heroic level of old time.
To be forgot at first is little pain
To a heart conscious of such high intent
As must be deathless on the lips of men; 195
But, having been a name, to sink and be
A something which the world can do without,
Which, having been or not, would never change
The lightest pulse of fate, — this is indeed
A cup of bitterness the worst to taste, 200
And this thy heart shall empty to the dregs.
Endless despair shall be thy Caucasus,
And memory thy vulture; thou wilt find

Oblivion far lonelier than this peak, —
Behold thy destiny! Thou think'st it much 205
That I should brave thee, miserable god!
But I have braved a mightier than thou.
Even the tempting of this soaring heart,
Which might have made me, scarcely less than thou,
A god among my brethren weak and blind, — 210
Scarce less than thou, a pitiable thing
To be down-trodden into darkness soon.
But now I am above thee, for thou art
The bungling workmanship of fear, the block
That awes the swart Barbarian; but I 215
Am what myself have made, — a nature wise
With finding in itself the types of all, —
With watching from the dim verge of the time
What things to be are visible in the gleams
Thrown forward on them from the luminous past, — 220
Wise with the history of its own frail heart,
With reverence and with sorrow, and with love,
Broad as the world, for freedom and for man.

Thou and all strength shall crumble, except Love,
By whom, and for whose glory, ye shall cease: 225
And, when thou art but a dim moaning heard
From out the pitiless gloom of Chaos, I
Shall be a power and a memory,
A name to fright all tyrants with, a light
Unsetting as the pole-star, a great voice 230
Heard in the breathless pauses of the fight
By truth and freedom ever waged with wrong,
Clear as a silver trumpet, to awake
Huge echoes that from age to age live on

In kindred spirits, giving them a sense 235
Of boundless power from boundless suffering wrung:
And many a glazing eye shall smile to see
The memory of my triumph (for to meet
Wrong with endurance, and to overcome
The present with a heart that looks beyond, 240
Are triumph), like a prophet eagle, perch
Upon the sacred banner of the Right.
Evil springs up, and flowers, and bears no seed,
And feeds the green earth with its swift decay,
Leaving it richer for the growth of truth; 245
But Good, once put in action or in thought,
Like a strong oak, doth from its boughs shed down
The ripe germs of a forest. Thou, weak god,
Shalt fade and be forgotten! but this soul,
Fresh-living still in the serene abyss, 250
In every heaving shall partake, that grows
From heart to heart among the sons of men, —
As the ominous hum before the earthquake runs
Far through the Ægean from roused isle to isle, —
Foreboding wreck to palaces and shrines, 255
And mighty rents in many a cavernous error
That darkens the free light to man: — This heart,
Unscarred by thy grim vulture, as the truth
Grows but more lovely 'neath the beaks and claws
Of Harpies blind that fain would soil it, shall 260
In all the throbbing exultations share
That wait on freedom's triumphs, and in all
The glorious agonies of martyr-spirits, —
Sharp lightning-throes to split the jagged clouds
That veil the future, showing them the end, — 265

Pain's thorny crown for constancy and truth,
Girding the temples like a wreath of stars.
This is a thought, that, like the fabled laurel,
Makes my faith thunder-proof; and thy dread bolts
Fall on me like the silent flakes of snow 270
On the hoar brows of aged Caucasus:
But, O thought far more blissful, they can rend
This cloud of flesh, and make my soul a star!

Unleash thy crouching thunders now, O Jove!
Free this high heart, which, a poor captive long, 275
Doth knock to be let forth, this heart which still,
In its invincible manhood, overtops
Thy puny godship, as this mountain doth
The pines that moss its roots. Oh, even now,
While from my peak of suffering I look down, 280
Beholding with a far-spread gush of hope
The sunrise of that Beauty, in whose face,
Shone all around with love, no man shall look
But straightway like a god he is uplift
Unto the throne long empty for his sake, 285
And clearly oft foreshadowed in wide dreams
By his free inward nature, which nor thou,
Nor any anarch after thee, can bind
From working its great doom, — now, now set free
This essence, not to die, but to become 290
Part of that awful Presence which doth haunt
The palaces of tyrants, to hunt off,
With its grim eyes and fearful whisperings
And hideous sense of utter loneliness,
All hope of safety, all desire of peace, 295
All but the loathed forefeeling of blank death, —

Part of that spirit which doth ever brood
In patient calm on the unpilfered nest
Of man's deep heart, till mighty thoughts grow fledged
To sail with darkening shadow o'er the world, 300
Filling with dread such souls as dare not trust
In the unfailing energy of Good,
Until they swoop, and their pale quarry make
Of some o'erbloated wrong, — that spirit which
Scatters great hopes in the seed-field of man, 305
Like acorns among grain, to grow and be
A roof for freedom in all coming time!
But no, this cannot be; for ages yet,
In solitude unbroken, shall I hear
The angry Caspian to the Euxine shout, 310
And Euxine answer with a muffled roar,
On either side storming the giant walls
Of Caucasus with leagues of climbing foam
(Less, from my height, than flakes of downy snow),
That draw back baffled but to hurl again, 315
Snatched up in wrath and horrible turmoil,
Mountain on mountain, as the Titans erst,
My brethren, scaling the high seat of Jove,
Heaved Pelion upon Ossa's shoulders broad
In vain emprise. The moon will come and go 320
With her monotonous vicissitude;
Once beautiful, when I was free to walk
Among my fellows, and to interchange
The influence benign of loving eyes,
But now by aged use grown wearisome; — 325
False thought! most false! for how could I endure
These crawling centuries of lonely woe

Unshamed by weak complaining, but for thee,
Loneliest, save me, of all created things,
Mild-eyed Astarte, my best comforter, 330
With thy pale smile of sad benignity?

Year after year will pass away and seem
To me, in mine eternal agony,
But as the shadows of dumb summer clouds,
Which I have watched so often darkening o'er 335
The vast Sarmatian plain, league-wide at first,
But, with still swiftmess, lessening on and on
Till cloud and shadow meet and mingle where
The gray horizon fades into the sky,
Far, far to northward. Yes, for ages yet 340
Must I lie here upon my altar huge,
A sacrifice for man. Sorrow will be,
As it hath been, his portion; endless doom,
While the immortal with the mortal linked
Dreams of its wings and pines for what it dreams, 345
With upward yearn unceasing. Better so:
For wisdom is meek sorrow's patient child,
And empire over self, and all the deep
Strong charities that make men seem like gods;
And love, that makes them be gods, from her breasts 350
Sucks in the milk that makes mankind one blood.
Good never comes unmixed, or so it seems,
Having two faces, as some images
Are carved, of foolish gods; one face is ill;
But one heart lies beneath, and that is good, 355
As are all hearts, when we explore their depths.
Therefore, great heart, bear up! thou art but type
Of what all lofty spirits endure, that fain

Would win men back to strength and peace through love:
 Each hath his lonely peak, and on each heart 360
 Envy, or scorn, or hatred, tears lifelong
 With vulture beak; yet the high soul is left;
 And faith, which is but hope grown wise; and love
 And patience, which at last shall overcome.

NOTES.

- 1-6. Study the figure carefully.
- 14-20. A beautiful expression.
- 49. *Jove*, Jupiter. Same as the Greek Zeus.
- 75. Explain the meaning.
- 79. How can one's nature be his doom?
- 84. Explain the meaning.
- 108. Antecedent of *which*.
- 109. See Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:
 "He were no lion, were not Romans hinds."
- 115. Define "adamant."
- 116. See Matthew, vii: 24-27.
- 147-178. Commit to memory.
- 188. What lines of the Commemoration Ode are suggested by this line?
- 193-201. Note the strong contrast between greatness and littleness.
- 202. A strong metaphor.
- 224. Is this a truth?
- 238-241. Commit parenthesis.
- 243-248. "Evil is only the slave of good,
 Sorrow the servant of joy." — *Holland*.
 "The first of all gospels is that a lie cannot endure." — *Carlyle*.
- 235. Why "palaces" and "shrines"?
- 260. *Harpies*, foul creatures of Greek mythology that with beak and claw tore and befouled all they touched.
- 269-271. Fine simile.
- 279-307. Should this sentence be shortened into two or more sentences?
- 310. *Euxine*, Black sea.
- 330. *Astarte*, symbol of Nature.
- 360-364. The summing-up of the teachings of the poem is in these lines.

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